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Gardens by the sea: the buttonquails' final refuge

The Andalusian buttonquail (*Turnix sylvaticus sylvaticus*) is a shy creature, more often heard than seen, and consequently rarely studied or observed. In fact, no one had taken a photograph of a live buttonquail until 2007. Formerly found in up to seven countries around the westernmost part of the Mediterranean Sea, this taxon has suffered a generalized, though largely unnoticed, decline. Large parts of its natural habitat, lowland Mediterranean scrubland, have disappeared due to human encroachment and overgrazing by cattle. Nowadays, the only known extant population of this critically endan-

gered subspecies occupies a small farmland area on the Atlantic Moroccan coast.

Can we conserve this imperiled bird when the whole population lives in an area that is intensively used by people? The main challenge will be improving farmers' living standards while also maintaining the biological requirements of these birds through good farming practices. Currently, buttonquails have found refuge in small, traditionally irrigated vegetable gardens of pumpkin, alfalfa, maize, tomato, pepper, and other crops. Sustainable agriculture certification programs could help maintain the availability of such habitat by creating a market for high-quality, buttonquail-friendly food products. In summary, nature conservation has to be with the people and for the people.

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